



Single Working Mothers are the focus of attention on International Women's Day

Of the many events that were held in Aruba for March 8, International Women's Day, possibly one of the most informative and productive was an all day seminar conducted by the Women's Committee of the Federacion di Trahadornan di Aruba (FTA)- The Aruba Federation of Workers. Minister of Education and Public Works, Marisol Lopez-Tromp welcomed a gather in social workers and members of Parliament that are concerned with the plight of the single working mother in Aruba, a section of the population that is a far larger proportion than most would think. Parliament members Monica Arends Kock, , Ms. Van Popple, and President of the Parliament Mervyn Ras, working women themselves, showed great interest and concern for this topic. The Palm Beach room of the Holiday Inn Sunspree Resort was well filled with workers from the social services that are concerned with assisting this group in maintaining a living and a viable family unit. Also offering a word of welcome to the people that attempt to assist this growing portion of the island's work force was the President of the FTA, Anselmo Pontillius. In private conversation, he expressed his great concern for the obstacles that single working mothers must surmount, but did mention that in Aruba, at least there is financial assistance from the government and social services to assist them to some degree.

A detailed statistical report presented by Ms. Monique Plaza-Maduro presented data comparing the work force in relation to the general population revealed that as of the year 2000 there were 5,523 Single Mother households in Aruba, as compared to 539 Single Father households. This report also presented the statistics of married and unmarried couples, education, and working situation in regards to age, sex, and marital status. It compared how all these factors inter-relate, and also how they have changed from the year 1991 to the year 2000. Some startling and revelatory information was presented, such as the fact that in Aruba, women have achieved a far higher level of education than men have. In the age group of twenty to twenty-four 214 woman will earn a Bachelor's Degree as opposed to 100 men. From the ages of twenty-four to twenty-nine, 123 will earn a higher university degree as opposed to 100 men. Women in Aruba also outnumber men, but not in a very large proportion as there are 9.2 men to every 10 women. That would indicate that the reason for so many single mother households is not for lack of a male partner in proportion to the number of women on the island.

Charts showing the relationship of men and women in their single years show a peak during the fortieth decade of age, with women outnumbering men. This could be interpreted as a time of "mid-life crisis" when divorce often strikes many families. Other interesting data presented examined the influx of immigrants to Aruba over the ten-year span of the nineties, which increased enormously, particularly from Colombia. An average of 1800 women a year migrate to Aruba, of which 28.2% are from Colombia, but another 26.% are from Aruba or the Netherlands Antilles, but this would indicate a returning population, possibly from University in Holland or the States. Another very interesting graph revealed that despite higher education, the work force still consists primarily of men, of which 74% are active on the labor market, as opposed to only 57.7% of the female population. Of the working women between the ages of eighteen and forty-five, 18.2% are single mothers. On the average, as around the world, women would appear to earn less than men for the same work, approximately 525 florins (\$300) per month less. Statistics also showed that far more Aruban woman return to work after childbirth than other national groups living on the island.

A number of issues were presented during this daylong seminar from early morning until late afternoon. Other speakers included Gene Nahar form the Department of Labor, Mr. L. Milliard, and from the Department of Social Services, Mrs. Enid de Kort and also Mrs. Blequis Moreau. The many difficulties that single mothers face and some of the possible solutions to assisting them were presented and discussed as social service workers must face the changes that current times are making on the traditional family structure.